

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

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R 061405Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6739

USLO PEKING

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 1767

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, IN

SUBJECT: SINO-INDIAN "STRAWS IN THE WIND?"

SUMMARY: THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CHINESE TEAM AT THE THIRTY-THIRD WORLD TABLE TENNIS TOURNAMENT IN CALCUTTA ARE GENERATING INCREASING PRESS AND PUBLIC COMMENT IN INDIA. ALTHOUGH THE TOURNAMENT WAS OFFICIALLY OPENED FEBRUARY 5 AND CONTINUES THROUGH FEBRUARY 16, THERE IS ALREADY CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION THAT SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS WILL SOMEHOW EMERGE FROM CONFIDENTIAL

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THE EVENT IN A MUCH IMPROVED STATE. END SUMMARY.

1. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF RECENT STRAWS IN THE WIND POINTING TO A POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENT IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS. SEVERAL RELATE TO EVENTS IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE CHINESE TENNIS TEAM'S ARRIVAL IN CALCUTTA JANUARY 29; OTHERS HAVE ARisen SINCE AS A RESULT OF STATEMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO THE LEADER OF THE CHINESE TEAM AND THE ARRANGEMENTS BEING MADE BY THE INDIAN HOSTS. WE LIST A FEW SUCH "STRAWS" BELOW:

2. ITEM ONE--: THE INDIAN EMBASSY'S REPUBLIC DAY RECEPTION IN PEKING: THE INDIAN PRESS HAS REPORTED THAT VICE FOREIGN MINISTER HAN NIEN-LUNG WAS THE RANKING CHINESE OFFICIAL AT CHARGE MEHROTRA'S REPUBLIC DAY RECEPTION IN PEKING JANUARY 24. WE NOTE THAT LAST YEAR THE RANKING PRC GUEST WAS THE VICE MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH HUANG SHU-TSE, WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THE ASIAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT AS THE MOST SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL IN ATTENDANCE. ALTHOUGH THE INDIAN PRESS HAS NOT MADE MUCH OF THIS FACT, HINDU CORRESPONDENT K.V. NARAIN FROM TOKYO COMMENTED (QUITE CORRECTLY SO FAR AS WE CAN TELL) THAT THIS WAS "THE FIRST TIME IN ABOUT A DECADE THAT SUCH A SENIOR OFFICIAL, ESPECIALLY FROM THE FOREIGN OFFICE" ATTENDED THE FUNCTION.

3. ITEM TWO--: PREMIER CHOU'S REPUBLIC DAY MESSAGE.  
ACCORDING TO A FBIS MONITOR OF A PEKING HINDI-LANGUAGE BROADCAST TO INDIA, CHOU CONVEYED CONGRATULATIONS TO MRS. GANDHI, THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE GREAT PEOPLE OF INDIA OHMJHE OCCASION OF REPUBLIC DAY. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO LAY OUR HANDS ON A COMPARABLE FBIS REPORT FOR 1974, WE HAVE FOUND ON PRESS ITEM (INDIAN EXPRESS, FEBRUARY 4, 1974) INDICATING CHOU'S MESSAGE LAST YEAR WAS ADDRESSED ONLY TO MRS. GANDHI AND THE INDIAN PEOPLE, NOT THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT. IN A CONVERSATION FEBRUARY 5, WE ASKED THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DESK OFFICER WHETHER THE 1974 INDIAN EXPRESS REPORT WAS SUBSTANTIALLY CORRECT, AND HE SAID IT WAS. HE HAD NO READY INTERPRETATION OF WHAT THE ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE MIGHT MEAN. SO FAR AS WE KNOW NEITHER THE 1974 NOR 1975 MESSAGES HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN THE INDIAN PRESS.

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4. ITEM THREE--: THE RETURN OF CHARGE MEHROTRA. THE INDIAN CHARGE IN PEKING HAS RETURNED TO DELHI FOR "CONSULTATIONS AND LEAVE." OUR IMPRESSION FROM SEVERAL SOURCES IS THAT MEHROTRA'S LEAVE WAS LONG OVERDUE AND PROBABLY SCHEDULED SOME WEEKS AGO. BUT AT LEAST ONE WELL-REGARDED JOURNALIST (PRITHVIS CHAKRAVARTI OF THE HINDUSTAN TIMES) HAS CHARACTERIZED THE RETURN AS "SUDDEN", AND AS ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE THAT THIS SPORTS ACTIVITY MAY BE TURNED INTO A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL EXERCISE".

5. ITEM FOUR--: THE CHINESE TEAM. THE POLITICAL SPECULATION HERE HAS ALSO FOCUSED ON THE FACT THAT THE CHINESE TEAM, SAID TO NUMBER BETWEEN 48 AND 62 MEMBERS ACCORDING TO DIFFERING ACCOUNTS, IS BEING LED BY A VICE MINISTER FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORTS, CHAO CHENG-HUNG. THE VICE MINISTER HAS ALREADY BEEN REPORTED BY INDIAN JOURNALISTS AS HAVING SAID "THE CHINESE PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS VERY FRIENDLY SENTIMENTS FOR THE INDIAN PEOPLE," THAT THE TEAM HAD COME TO PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNITY AND FRIENDSHIP AMONG THE PEOPLE AND SPORTS LOVERS OF INDIA AND CHINA," ETC. THE CHINESE CHARGE IN DELHI, MA MU-MING, AS WELL AS OTHER EMBASSY OFFICIALS HAVE NOW JOINED THE CHINESE CONTINGENT IN CALCUTTA.

6. ITEM FIVE: GOI/MEA ARRANGEMENTS. ALTHOUGH THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND THE MINISTRY ARE PUBLICLY KEEPING ALOOF FROM THE EVENT IN CALCUTTA, THEY HAVE APPARENTLY APPROVED A VISIT BY THE CHINESE TEAM TO DELHI FOR EXHIBITION GAMES AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF THE CALCUTTA TOURNAMENT. ACCORDING TO G.K. REDDY IN THE FEBRUARY 2 HINDU, THE CHINESE TEAM BEGAN "DROPPING SOME HINTS" ON ITS ARRIVAL THAT IT WISHED TO SEE MORE OF INDIA THAN CALCUTTA, INCLUDING DELHI, AND IT BECAME CLEAR THAT A "POLITICAL DECISION" WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE AT THE MEA. (THE CHINESE EMBASSY OFFICIALS HERE HAVE HINTED AT POSSIBLE PLANS FOR THE TABLE TENNIS TEAM COMING TO DELHI SINCE MIND-JANUARY.) ON FEBRUARY 4 IT WAS REPORTED THAT THE CHINESE WOULD BE PERMITTED TO GO TO DELHI. OF FEBRUARY 5 AN MEA OFFICIAL TOLD US THAT TRAVEL TO OTHER INDIAN CITIES WAS NOT CONTEMPLATED AT PRESENT. IN A FURTHER DEVELOPMENT INDICATING SOME DEGREE OF FLEXIBILITY ON THE PART OF THE GOI, VICE MINISTER CHAO CHENG-HUNG WAS PERMITTED TO CALL ON THE CHIEF MINISTER OF THE GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL ON FEBRUARY 5.

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7. ITEM SIX: MRS. GANDHI'S REMARKS. IN A FEBRUARY 27 INTERVIEW IN THE ASAHI EVENING NEWS IN TOKYO, MRS. GANDHI, AFTER ACCUSING CHINA OF INTERFERING IN INDIAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS, SUPPLYING ARMS TO BORDER TRIBES, AND TRAINING GUERRILLAS TO RETURN TO FIGHT IN INDIA, SHIFTED EMPHASIS TO NOTE THAT SHE THOUGHT IT WAS "WH TIME" INDIA AND CHINA GOT TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN EACH NATION INDIVIDUALLY AND PERHAPS THE ASIAN "CONTINENT AS A WHOLE."

8. IT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE ABOVE EVENTS HAVE BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY CAUTIONING COMMENTS BY A FEW OFFICIALS ON BOTH SIDES. ACCORDING TO THE FEBRUARY 2 HINDU EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER CHAVAN TOLD A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON FEBRUARY 1 THAT ALTHOUGH INDIA HAD REPEATEDLY INDICATED ITS DESIRE FOR BETTER RELATIONS WITH CHINA, THERE HAD BEEN NO RECIPROCAL

GESTURE FROM THE CHINESE SIDE FOR NORMALIZATION. A CHINESE EMBASSY DIPLOMAT TOLD US PRIVATELY JANUARY 26 THAT HE RATHER DOUBTED THAT ANY "PING-PONG DIPLOMACY" WAS IN THE OFFING, FOR "IT TAKES TWO TO PLAY PING-PONG."

9. COMMENT: IT ALL ADDS UP TO MORE "ACTIVITY" THAN HAS BEEN VISIBLE IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS FOR SOME TIME. WITH A CHINESE DELEGATION DUE IN NEW DELHI IN ABOUT TWO WEEKS TO ATTEND THE ESCAP CONFERENCE, THE DOOR WOULD BE OPEN FOR INDIAN AND CHINESE FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE--IF EITHER WISHES. INDIAN OFFICIALS ARE PRIVATELY VERY CAUTIOUS AND SOME SENIOR ONES (JOINT SECRETARY EAST ASIA N.B. MENON) PESSIMISTIC ANYTHING WILL EMERGE FROM ALL THIS. WE WILL WATCH CAREFULLY AND WOULD WELCOME COMMENTS FROM HONG KONG AND PEKING.

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